

Special Section on Ecozoic Wisdom Circles

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This portion of this *Reader* is on Ecozoic Wisdom Circles. There is a hymn by Harry Emerson Fosdick written in 1930 called “God of Grace and God of Glory.” The hymn is a prayer in which people pray for wisdom and courage. Here are words from the hymn that I often recall:

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.

When Fosdick wrote the hymn, the world was falling apart in a way similar to our own time. The Great Depression had begun, the settlement of World War I (then called the Great War) had failed. Fascism, Nazism, racial puritanism, militarism, and nationalism were taking hold. Rapid modernization and industrialization were driving forces behind new ambitions. Soon to come were the horrors of World War II and the pall of nuclear nightmare which persists today.

The post-World War II period saw an acceleration, now called the “Great Acceleration,” of economic growth. The world seemingly united around science, technology, engineering, and trade and the spread of Western Enlightenment thinking and consumerist culture. In the enthusiasm of globalization, Earth became a global village or a small blue ball we could hold in our hands. It was nearly subject to our control, we thought. As advertisements trumpeted, we—a population of humans now grown to almost 8 billion—could have it all.

Today we are still seeking solutions to our problems in technology, the magical potion of the Great Acceleration. People often say that we humans have all the tools we need, or we can soon obtain them! Ah, if we only had the political will to set aside our differences and seek peace through prosperity and technology, all would be well.

Contrary to this heartening prospect, we might consider whether we are in the 1930s again, only this time with higher stakes. The habitability of our planet for humans and many other species is in peril; our instruments of ecological destruction and of military might have grown greater; our budding liberal, multi-lateral social contract that had allayed our fears of great power conflicts is, we fear, in tatters. Some of us thought it was not sustainable anyway in ecological terms, but the present signs of the collapse of this order seems to auger in an even more destructive phase of human-Earth relations.

Cataclysmic peril and tragedy are not new in Earth’s or humankind’s history. What is new in both human and Earth history is the Anthropocene—humans have become the dominant force in global climate, ecology, and geology. Our modern human notion of “progress” is nearly the opposite for Earth’s diverse life and life support systems. And in Clive Hamilton’s words,

Contrary to the comforting expectations that in the Anthropocene we can have “the kind of nature we wish to have,” as we enter the new epoch, we will meet an

Earth that is further and further from the Earth we might want. And against the belief that “the world we will inhabit is the one we have made,” the world we will have to live with is the Earth we have turned against us.⁹

We need a new kind of wisdom to guide our path forward as a species, an ecozoic human wisdom grounded in the wisdom of the lifeworld. And we need courage to live by this wisdom in these days, and weeks, and years ahead.

We need a new social contract, one that is an ecological social contract. Bruno Latour explains why this is so by observing that we are in a new Hobbesian condition of a “war of all against all.” This time it is not before the formation of a human social contract, it is because the human social contract is incomplete. The protagonists now include plants, animals, fires, storms, sea levels, and carbon emissions, as well as the various human factions—all are seeking their places in Earth’s limited space.¹⁰ This new ecological social contract has to be assembled bit by bit in a political process (a process among the people) over a long period of time.¹¹



Photo by Beth MacDonald, Unsplash

“Ecozoic Wisdom Circles,” by whatever name they are called and whatever form they take, must surely be a part of this process if we are to bring into being this new ecological social contract.

To this end, CES is inviting ecozoans to join in Ecozoic Wisdom Circles to undertake the task of assembling the new ecological social contract with the mutual support of

⁹ Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017), 43, 47-48 (footnote omitted).

¹⁰ Bruno Latour, “Facing Gaia: Six Lectures on the Political Theology of Nature,” (Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion, Edinburgh, Scotland, February 18-28, 2013), 103, available at https://macaulay.cuny.edu/eportfolios/wakefield15/files/2015/01/LATOUR-GIFFORD-SIX-LECTURES_1.pdf (accessed April 14, 2022).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

others. We have no particular template for what these circles should be. There are already many in existence with various names. We only seek to amplify this movement.

We are eager to see how these develop. Michael Powell, powell14@cox.net, of the United States and Di Shearer, dishearer@icloud.com, of Australasia, will be CES's contact points for people who wish to form circles in association with CES. The role CES will play, and the services we will provide to the circles, will develop over time.

Here follows three different invitations to form these circles. You may use them as you like.

1. From Di Shearer of Australia, an invitation to form Ecozoic Wisdom Circles.
2. From Michael Powell of Arizona, an invitation to form Ecozoic Conversation Pods.
3. From Peter Berry of Washington State, an invitation he used to form "Seedbearers: Living between the No Longer and the Not Yet," a group that has been in existence for over a decade.

We also call to your attention [the invitation](#) and [supplementary materials](#) that CES sent out in 2020 to invite people to join in Ecozoic Conversation Circles. Two circles came into being at that time and one is continuing.

Please send us the materials you have used in forming such circles or ones you develop to do so. And please send to us (via Michael Powell, powell14@cox.net, or Di Shearer, dishearer@icloud.com) your insights on these circles and also your reports on these circles that now exist or that come into being.

